# The Golden Staircase

His Divine Grace
Swami B. R. Sridhar

*All Glories To Sri Guru and Gauranga*

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*Practical Steps on the*
*Path of Devotional Service-Life Fulfillment*

Compiled from informal discourses given between
1981 and 1985 by

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# Contents

Forward.....vii

Chapter One
The Conscious Sky .....1

Chapter Two
The Eye to See Śrī Guru .....13

Chapter Three
Seeing With the Eye of the Soul .....29

Chapter Four
Test, Taste, and Triumph.....41

# FOREWORD

I feel very fortunate to have the opportunity to present these gems from the treasurehouse of devotional service to the Supreme Godhead which emanated from the divine lotus mouth of Oṁ Viṣṇupād Paramahaṁsa Śrī Śrīla B.R. Śrīdhar Dev-Goswāmī Mahārāj between 1981 and 1985. Known affectionately to his disciples simply as Śrīla Guru Mahārāj, His Divine Grace personified the life of eternality, supra-mundane knowledge, and divine happiness, and he planted the nectar-seeds of *Kṛṣṇa-prema*—the supreme goal of life—in the hearts of the fortunate souls. He extinguished the burning fire of separation we felt in our hearts following the disappearance from this world of the great ambassador of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness to the West, His Divine Grace Śrīla A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swāmī Prabhupāda, simultaneously fulfilling our cherished desires for spiritual nourishment and inspiring within us an ever-greater thirst for spiritual perfection.

The topics presented here have been selected to illustrate the proper and practical way for a sincere *sādhaka* (aspirant) to progress on the path of pure devotional service to the Supreme Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, especially in

His form as Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu. Śrīla Guru Mahārāj repeatedly emphasized that the path should be followed carefully, step by step, without omitting anything, lest one fall into the traps of either *sahajiyāism* (imitationism) or *māyāvāda* (impersonalism). He taught that by always keeping *sādhu saṅga* (association of good devotees)—either personally or through their *śikṣā* (instructions), by chanting the Holy Names of the Lord with sincerity and faith, and by rendering loving service to Śrī Guru and the Vaiṣṇavas, one could steadily progress on the path back to Godhead.

This progress continues and accelerates by our acceptance of ever-higher conceptions and elimination of lower ones, and such progress is infinite, going beyond the *taṭasthā* region of *virajā* (*nirvāṇa*), the goal of the Buddhists—and the *brahmajyoti,* the goal of the yogīs—and onward through Śiva-loka to the spiritual abodes of Vaikuṇṭha, Ayodhya, Dwārakā, Mathurā, and finally Goloka Vṛndāvan. There the Supreme is worshiped as Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Govinda in Vraja-Dhāma or as Their combined form as Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu in Nabadwīp-Dhāma, and it is by Their own grace that one may ultimately attain to the inconceivably high position of service to the servants of the servants of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇi Herself, which is the ultimate goal of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas.

Preliminary instructions regarding the process for controlling the mind and senses and the principles of devotional behavior have been given in books such as

*Śrī Upadeśāmṛta* by Śrīla Rupa Goswāmī, and carefully following this advice in a properly-adjusted way will ensure genuine progress on the path of *bhakti*. Śrīla Śrīdhar Mahārāj spoke at length on all these topics, but he always emphasized that it is one's sincere internal hankering for the Lord's service and the genuine feeling of one's own incapacity which are the real keys to realizing *śaraṇāgati,* the pure soul's surrender.

Ultimately, when genuine divine love awakens within the soul, that love will itself direct the soul to his or her best serving location within a particular serving group (*svarūpeṇa-vyavasthitiḥ*) imbued with one of the predominant serving mellows of either servitorship (*dāsya*), friendship (*sakhya*), guardianship (*vātsalya*), or the all-inclusive mellow of amorous love (*mādhurya-rasa*). Śrīla Guru Mahārāj explained that within these *rasas* there are "divisions and subdivisions," heads of groups and their followers, right-wing and left-wing parties—so much gradation, all of which is ultimately arranged by the Supreme Lord's own Yogamāyā potency to provide a dynamic interplay of 'variety-in-oneness' by which the Lord's pastimes (*līlā*) are supported, nurtured, and enhanced.

The Infinite is not static (*nirviśeṣa*) but dynamic, and that dynamism generates sweetness in service through both union and separation. Śrīla Śrīdhar Mahārāj's explanations of these finer points and his revelations of the inner meaning of the *ślokas* of *Śrīmad Bhagavad-Gītā* and *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* and the Gāyatrī and other

mantras give such new dimensions of depth to one's consciousness and nourishment to one's devotional creeper (*bhakti-latā*) that they are impossible for the truly fortunate souls to ignore.

The devotees who were introduced to the teachings of pure devotional theism by the unparalleled preceptor and *śaktyāveśa avatār* Śrīla A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swāmī Prabhupāda will find in this book a very sweet and glorious illumination of his teachings. The "matchless gift" of Kṛṣṇa consciousness which Śrīla Prabhupāda gave to the West must be carefully accepted in the heart and preserved and nurtured there. That is only possible by the supporting strength of the devotional illumination given by great beacon lights of the spiritual world such as Śrīla Śrīdhar Mahārāj, whom Śrīla Prabhupāda loved and revered as his own śīkṣā Guru in spiritual matters. The fortunate and awakened soul must see the value of this spiritual interchange as a cause of growth if he is to really progress towards the all-harmonizing Truth beyond all material sectarian concerns.

It is also my heartfelt feeling that the legacy of both Śrīla Prabhupāda and Śrīla Śrīdhar Mahārāj is being carefully preserved, practiced, and preached by Śrīla Guru Mahārāj's successor Śrīla Bhakti Sundar Govinda Mahārāj, and that in the unbearable fire of separation from those two great souls, our hearts may be given hope once again.

The Lord mercifully comes as the *ācārya* to deliver Himself to the souls of this world. All glories to

Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu! I offer my sincere *daṇḍavat praṇāms* to all the holy Vaiṣṇavas through whom we may have the benediction of divine faith's revelation.

Humbly,
Swāmī B.S. Tridaṇḍī
Disappearance day of Śrīla Śrīnivās Ācārya
21 November, 1993

His Divine Grace
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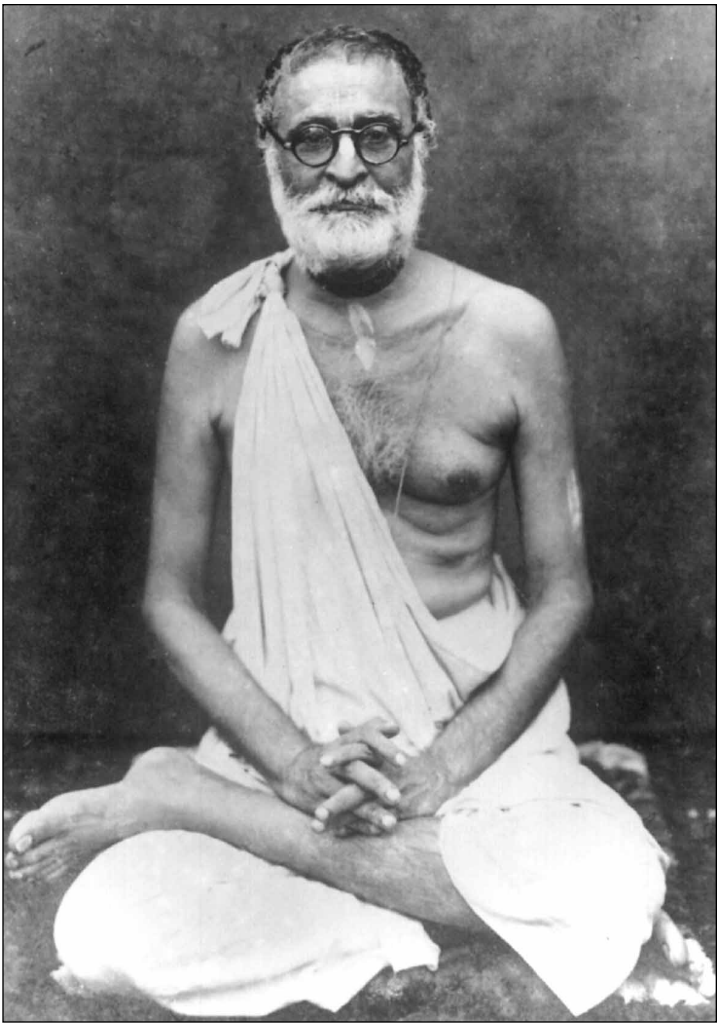

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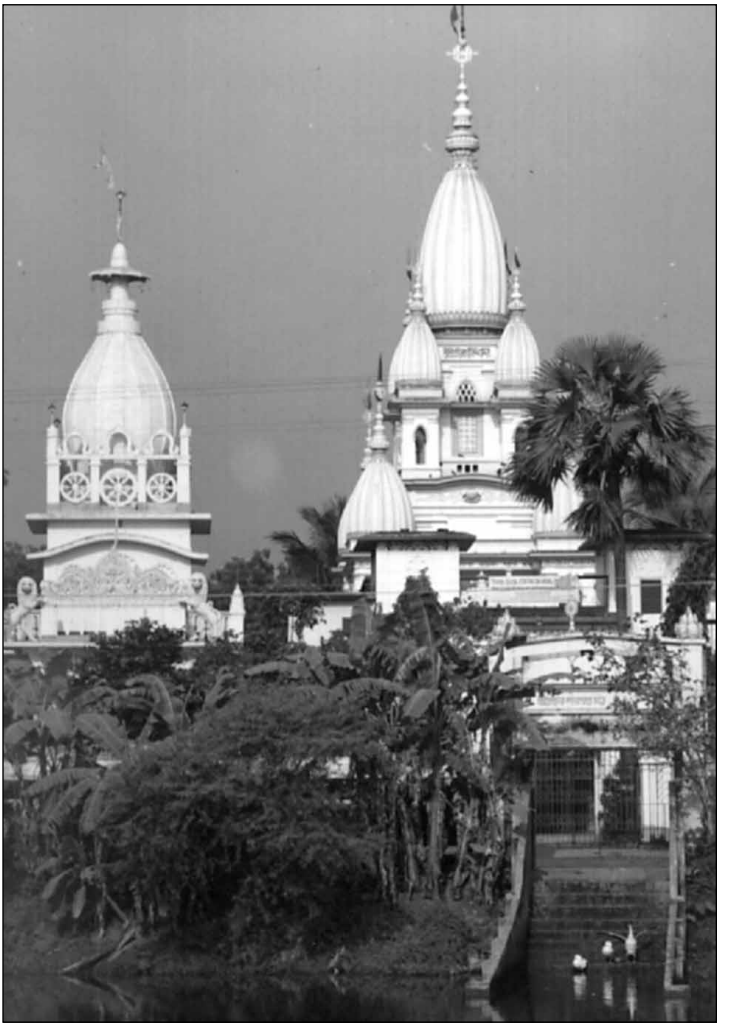

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Nabadwip Śrī Chaitanya Sāraswat Maṭh

## Chapter One

The original substance is spirit, is soul, is consciousness, and matter forms a part of that conscious portion, that conscious substance. It is not that matter has produced consciousness, but it is in one part of consciousness. Consciousness is infinite, and everything is in that ocean. Somewhere there is ice, somewhere moss, somewhere iron—they are all in that ocean, these different conceptions. But consciousness is all-in-all, and everything has its shelter there. Just as you find patches of clouds in the sky, or so many specks of dust

in the air, so the material conception is there in the sky of consciousness. It is a sky—the conscious sky—and somewhere there are patches of clouds or dust. You can't see the air, but the dust is in the air! You can't see the sky—the actual ether—but the clouds are in the sky! So the background is consciousness, and therein we find somewhere is dust, somewhere is a cloud.

Darwin and others have proposed that consciousness was originally generated from material elements, but my response to that is, "Fossil fatherism? Crush it, and establish a spiritual infinite!" It is all spiritual: the "fossil conception" is a part of so many conceptions in the spiritual plane. Consciousness is in the background and there are developed positions, gradations, within consciousness: *bhūr, bhuvar, svar, maha, jana, tapa, satya, brahmāloka*— and when service is added, it is enhanced. A sweet structure begins from the point when service is added to consciousness. Service can construct a beautiful capital, a beautiful country. It is there, and you have only to feel it, enter, and take up your appointed service. You will think, "This is my home! This appointment feels very friendly to me. Now I have come home." This is the innate capacity or substance, innate nature—*svarūpa*—which is presently covered by ignorance, by misconception.

## MADNESS AND MALENGAGEMENT

A madman, leaving his own sweet home, wanders in the street and thinks that it is imperative for him to collect

pieces of paper or cloth, as if that were his 'business'. It is absurd. His brain is focused in such a direction that he thinks, "It is my duty to collect these pieces of paper and pebbles." In this way he is going on, but what is the real, innate wealth of his heart? If he could only remember his home: his father, mother, other family members—his sweet, sweet home. But due to his madness, his consciousness is forcibly focused on some malengagement. Similarly, the position of so many persons—including philosophers, scientists, political leaders, and many more—is that their consciousness is focused toward the external direction, and there they are all busy 'collecting'. Some are collecting more pebbles, some more pieces of cloth or pieces of paper, but in this way they are going on. Swāmī Mahārāj (Śrīla A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swāmī Prabhupāda) said that, "The United Nations, UNESCO—all such world committees and barking dogs are both equal. Actually they are more dangerous because they are capturing the more intellectually-minded people, but they are of the same value. They are casting their own attention toward the material substance based on illusion and misconception, and posing in a very grand way, they are giving so much importance to that thing just as many dogs also bark to have possession of a particular thing. It is not more than that." With great courage Swāmī Mahārāj boldly refuted them, and this sort of conception is leading us to our higher prospect.

## SEEING BEYOND THE PERCEPTION OF THE SENSES

**Devotee:** Now the weather is starting to become hot!

**Śrīla Śrīdhar Mahārāj:** We should not pay much attention to that. It will come and go, come and go.

**mātrā-sparśās tu kaunteya**
**śītoṣṇa-sukha-duḥkha-dāḥ**
**āgamāpāyino 'nityas**
**tāṁs titikṣasva bhārata**
(*Bg. 2.14*)

"O son of Kunti, only the engagement of the senses with their objects gives rise to the sensations of cold, heat, pleasure, and pain. But these effects are temporary; they come and go. Therefore, O Bharata, you are to endure them."

Regarding this verse of the *Bhagavad-gītā,* one scholar, a Mr. Chatterjee, has explained this Sanskrit word *mātrā* to mean "what is measured by our senses, the result of our senses' measurement." In this way, the word *mātrā* comes near to the word 'matter,' it comes to mean matter or the world of material comfort. There are so many different views of the world. An ordinary man's estimation of the world and a scientist's estimation are different. An astronomer's estimation of the world is of another type, the politician's view is something else, the socialist's, the humanist's, the humanitarian's views—they are all different. But if we can come to the plane of the soul—even the lowest conception of what is the real inner self—that will help

us, and there will be a revolutionary change in our lives. All the things of this world will then seem to be trash, of no value, empty.

Presently the soul is captivated by a great many things which produce mean consciousness, but the solution is given in *Bhagavad-gītā*, how we can achieve control of our senses and gain control over the impulses of our mind. It is recommended there that step by step we try to rise up to the soul's plane, eliminating the lower planes: first the field of experience of the senses; then the mental field, the impulse which works through the senses; then the intellect, that which drives the mental tendency—and crossing those, that we try to find that point of light which is the soul. If in any way, by the soul's introspection you can perceive the soul, then whatever value you had assigned to this whole material manifestation will turn into ashes. You will see, "My real identification is here within! It is so wonderful, and valuable, and independent of all the hallucinations I was suffering from by coming in contact with the external world. The inner domain is so high, and my consciousness was focused so low, on such nasty things." That is the highest way to control one's senses, one's charm for the world, for wealth, women, and popularity.

## The Astonishing Soul

*Kanak, kāminī,* and *pratiṣṭhā*—collection of energy for sense-pleasure, sense-pleasure, and popularity-seek-

ing: these three things try to keep us down from consciousness of the self. So rise up step by step: from the world to the senses...to the mind, receiver of the sense-experience...to the guide of the sense-experience...and finally to the light which makes all these possible. That point of light is near and dear, and the others are like foreign agents who have come to capture me and focus me, that light, towards the rubbish and dung-like things of this world. If after having been focused here through our senses we become more attentive and see some nasty things, then some realization will come into our mind causing us to feel that such things are actually foreign to our real self, and only by connecting with them through our senses do we feel disturbed. On the whole it is like that. Then, upon rising up from the sense-plane you will find that there is another wonderful land of experience; the *ātmā* is such a wonderful thing.

**āścaryavat paśyati kaścid enam**
**āścaryavad vadati tathaiva cānyaḥ**
**āścaryavac cainam anyaḥ śṛṇoti**
**śrutvāpy enaṁ veda na caiva kaścit**
*(Bg. 2.29)*

"Some see the soul as astonishing, some describe him as astonishing, and some hear of him as astonishing; while others, even after hearing about him, cannot understand him at all."

Even after giving attention to all these things, still

it is very difficult to understand the soul properly. But our inner wealth is so valuable, and our present engagement is so nasty. On the whole, we must honestly admit that our condition is nasty. Our true selves are good, but our present situation is very nasty. But somehow we must get out of the intoxication of these nasty things, because to hanker after and obtain and mix closely with and relish these nasty things is improper for the soul. Whereas upon rising up to the Supersoul-area, we find that the greatest fulfillment of our life is in that soil. Whatever we presently consider to be "concrete things", to be real, are nasty. We are told to "be realistic", but that is to become 'unrealistic'!

## Withdraw From Knowledge

*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (1.1.2) says, *vedyaṁ vāstavam atra vastu śivadaṁ tāpa-trayonmūlanam:* Reality is *vāstavam vastu*, the real substance above all of the unreal, imaginary things of this world. All the accumulated knowledge in relation to this world is a wholesale concoction. It is the result of misreading the environment and is full of misinterpretation and misconception. The whole thing—the vocabulary, the history, the epics, the whole thing, whatever has been collected—is all a misrepresentation of the truth, and we are in the midst of that. We are captivated within that, but at the same time we have the capacity to enter the plane of real life because we are a particle of that higher world. So we must go back to God, back to home.

Home is there. What charm can there be for us here where there is death, and then birth again, and where everything is stale and produces dissipation and suffering? Mortality, suffering, and death—and even then it is not finished, but we must continuously come here again and again and follow the same course of life!

So try to obtain real relief, and help others also to take up their proper life away from this undesirable atmosphere. We must go "back to Godhead", where everything is wonderful. What is that Godhead? Our home is there!—Our home, sweet, sweet home. We are a child of that soil, and the scriptures urge us: "You have got this human life, this chance, so always try, by all means—by thinking, by meditation, by talking, by hearing—to cultivate your own true identity, your noble identity, in your homeland where the soul lives. Always, always, always engage yourself in that. Try to avoid this plane of misconception by any means and enter into that land."

Going back to Godhead means going back to our own soil, our real home. What is night to us now—that we will make our day! Where there is presently darkness to us—we are to find light there; and what is so apparently plain and expressively clear—that must be neglected. In our earnest calculation the entire world of exploitation and self-interest should be kicked into the darkness, and we should withdraw wholesale from that 'knowledge'. And what is dark to us now we should try to make light by always giving our attention, thought-

ful consideration, and adherence to achieving residence in the higher soil, the land of wonders where everything is wonderful.

## Shadow, Substance, and Sound

The spiritual plane is substantial. And why are things as they are here? This is the reflection of that plane, a perverted reflection. So that nature is also to be found here, but the substance is there, and this is like a shadow. The shadow is unsubstantial, without real existence—the substance is itself real existence. The difference is great. The *Upaniṣads* say:

**yasmin vijñāte sarvam evam vijñātam bhavati**
**yasmin prāpte sarvam idaṁ prāptaṁ bhavati**

"By knowing That (spiritual domain), everything is known; by attaining That, everything is attained."

We have been told this in a general way, but that does not mean that with this consciousness you will arrive in that plane and everything will then be in your fist. No; more and more you will continue to have an intense hankering to approach, to advance—and the more satisfaction you get, the more earnestness you will have to go forward, to go on. It is not to be finished. Here also in the shadow we do not find any 'finish', and this is the reflection, so it is a dynamic affair. "Go onward, go onward—more." But substance and shadow—that is the difference. That world cannot be eliminated. It is constant, eternal. There the soul is finding

real substance, but still he is not satisfied: "I want more." That is the nature of real substance, and sound will reveal it.

Here, sound is the most subtle thing, but there it is just the opposite; there, sound is a 'gross' thing. That is what reflection means, and it is perverted. So the right hand in the reflection is the left hand, and in the reflection of a tree, the top of the tree is in the bottom position. So in the plane of substance, sound is the most concrete thing. The subtlemost plane here—the nearest, innermost plane, that of sound—can cross over the many coverings of this world and come in connection with the nature of that existence, where the cover of that world is comprised of sound. So through sound, we can go inside there.

Śrī Jiva Goswami says,

**prathamaṁ nāmnāḥ śravaṇam antaḥkaraṇa-śuddhy-artham apekṣyaṁ śuddhe cāntaḥkaraṇe rūpaśravaṇena tad udaya-yogyatā bhavati: samyag udite ca rūpe guṇānāṁ sphuraṇaṁ sampādyate: tatas theṣu nāma-rūpa-guṇa-sphuriteṣv eva līlānāṁ sphuraṇaṁ bhavatīty abhipretya sādhana-kramo likhitaḥ: evaṁ kīrttana-smaraṇayoś ca jñeyam**

(*Bhakti Sandarbha*, Paragraph 256)

First listen to the Holy Name, and cultivate that sound divine. Then gradually, if we do it properly, we can find that next there is colour and figure—not drawn from this mundane world, but that sound has got its own figure and colour and will show itself.

Although we are presently far away from our orig-

inal consciousness, when our mind is purified and we are free from worldly, mundane thinking, then like lightning that Divine Name will reveal itself to us, producing some colour and figure within us, within our conception—and that form will be of another type, not like the colour and figure of this world.

From the relativity of that sound will first come the colour and figure, and next the quality. In this way, one will spring from the other: such sound must have such colour and figure, and such figure automatically must have such quality. It will come forth from within.

Then again, that quality is classified according to different intensities relative to the paraphernalia. From the quality, after the quality will come the association. And it will all come from the other plane and enter within the soul's conception. Then, from the Name, Form, Quality, and Associates will come their mutual transactions, the interaction between all these things, the waves and vibrations of different types—that is pastimes, *Līlā*.

And then the soul will find that his purest, finest ego, who he really is, also has a part to play in such a position. He will see his own soul in a particular place, a particular location there. He will see, "In this exact spot, I am there; my self is there." In this way, the infinite wave will come.

## Chapter Two

# The Eye to See Śrī Guru

**Devotee:** We are often told, regarding the Guru and the *śiṣya* (disciple), that if the *śiṣya* is not successful in becoming a completely pure devotee in this life, then the Guru will return by taking another birth. But does the Guru *personally* take another birth?

**Śrīla Śrīdhar Mahārāj:** The relationship must continue. Whether that particular soul who was delegated as the Guru in the previous life will personally come—whether he will again be sent or not—there is no guarantee; but in any case the disciple will maintain his awareness of that higher connection. He will recognize it just as it was in former stages, although it may be

in a different form. It will not be unknown to him. And he will also perceive that "I am not unknown to my master." But the Guru's external form may not be similar.

Suppose a disciple takes his next birth in a particular country or a particular sect. The Guru may also appear in a particular country or a particular sect, but that the disciple will again come exactly in the same position as before—that may not be. And that the Guru will also come as he did previously, in that fixed position—that also may not be. But they *will* be able to recognize one another. The Guru will know about the disciple's previous life, and the disciple will also think, "He knows everything about me." With such broadness of vision we are to look at our Guru Mahārāj. So *guru-tattva* means it is *sākṣādd haritvena:* not only the person, but the person plus something more. And that arrangement is made by the Lord or His *svarūpa-śakti*. But whatever the external circumstance, there will be no disturbance regarding the path for the disciple.

**Devotee:** I don't know if this is correct, but I have heard it said that if the disciple is not spiritually successful, then the Guru may not return back to Godhead but may remain in this *brahmāṇḍa* (universe). He may not return to Kṛṣṇa until the disciple can also go.

**Śrīla Śrīdhar Mahārāj:** If that is the case, then no Guru can ever return to Kṛṣṇa at any time, because the continuation of the disciples will go on, so he will have no final result at any time in his life. But we cannot

think that it is so. Sometimes he may be deputed himself, or others also may be deputed in that case. But the inner instruction and inner feeling and paraphernalia will be such that in any case the disciples will have no trouble. The officer may change, but the function will go on smoothly. So the Guru may return—the *nāma-guru, mantra-guru, sannyāsa-guru*—they are all Gurus, but we must recognize something similar in them, and hence we are given the statement about the ontological aspect of Guru: *sākṣādd haritvena samasta*–"I Myself appear as the Guru, who is simultaneously and inconceivably one with and different from Myself."

Kṛṣṇa says, *ācāryaṁ māṁ vijānīyāt:* "You should look there for Me. I am there. I am your Guru. With My different types of *śakti,* by the *jīvas*' recruitment or by any other way, it is My function to take you up to a different place. In every case I am there. I am there in My *Madhura-rasa śakti*, or *Sakhya-rasa śakti,* My *Vātsalya-rasa śakti, Dāsya-rasa śakti,* and in a general way also." Sometimes one may be recruited by the Rāmānuja *Sampradāya* and then be converted to join the Kṛṣṇa *Sampradāya,* the Gauḍīya *Sampradāya*. That is also possible. We are to remember the eternal link.

## Divine Unfoldment

**Devotee:** So if someone says that the Guru himself will personally come back—that is a mundane conception, a wrong conception?

**Śrīla Śrīdhar Mahārāj:** Yes. The main thread is there, but it will not always appear in the same form. Although to the beginners one may say that "he will come back," ultimately we find that a disciple may even be transferred into another section, and then another section, so that he may gradually reach his destination. According to the unfolding of his inner necessity, the departmental change may occur. And he will always perceive his own Guru in newer and newer ways. At first sight he perceived his Guru to be of one type; then again with progress he will see the same Guru in another way, and thereafter another new characteristic will be found in his Gurudeva. The disciple will feel, "I could not detect so much in my Guru in the beginning. I saw him in one particular way, but now I find that he is something more, and then he is still more." In this way there is divine unfoldment.

In this world there is unfoldment, and in the higher domain also there is unfoldment. So *āveśa,* the Guru is something like *śaktyāveśa*. There is the "chance contingency" *śaktyāveśa* who is deputed according to a particular time, place, or circumstance, and there is also the permanent *śaktyāveśa;* but in all cases, according to the necessity of the situation and by the divine dispensation of the Lord, the disciple will be connected, and he won't feel any distrust, it is the presence within. He will quench the thirst for the full progress of his heart, there will be divine unfoldment within his heart, and again he will begin a new thirst. And that new

thirst will be quenched by whom? His Guru. It will be quenched by his Guru and he won't have any feeling of unscrupulousness or anything else. As his internal thirst is being satisfied, he will feel, "There is my Gurudeva."

Wherever there is unfoldment—gradual unfoldment and full attention given to that—then we can understand that from the upper side there is Guru. Gurudeva is my guide; and as I progress, guidance of different types will be necessary for me. Always new guidance, and my progress will take me into different places, and there a new type of guidance, a new life, will again come. In this way dynamic life is going on, and the main thread is there: *raso vai saḥ*—the pure *rasa,* pure ecstasy. And my inner heart will approve: "Yes, I want this. This is my fate; this is my fortune." Otherwise, if any *madhyama-adhikārī* is appointed as Guru and has so many disciples, and if he is to come back again and again, then he could never enter into *nitya-līlā*. But that cannot be so. In any case, whoever is connected with a genuine Guru will be satisfied, because the Lord is present there.

So *ācāryaṁ māṁ vijānīyāt* is not in name only; it has a very specific purpose:

**ācāryaṁ māṁ vijānīyān, nāvamanyeta karhicit**
**na martya buddhyāsūyeta, sarva deva-mayo guruḥ**
*(Bhā: 11.17.27)*

Kṛṣṇa says, "Don't try to limit the *Ācārya*! You may have come up to a high position, but will you then

think that you have surpassed that *Ācārya* through whom you received your initial instruction in spiritual life? No, *nāvamanyeta*— don't think that there is less in him, don't consider him to be of lower position. *Nāvamanyeta*—I Myself was there! I was there in your primary teacher, in your 'college-level' teacher, and I am there in your 'post-graduate professor' also! So *nāvamanyeta,* don't look at only the outside. I Myself am your guide in different forms. It is I."

*Sarva deva-mayo guruḥ*: the *Ācārya* has got more spacious characteristics than that of the ordinary, general Vaiṣṇava. Kṛṣṇa says, "For you, I am there. And *mayānukūlena nabhasvateritam*—I am backing so many *Ācāryas*. There are so many *Ācāryas*, and I am working through them. The *Ācāryas* are like helmsmen in so many different boats, and I am the favorable wind helping those boats to make progress. So don't limit the *Ācārya*—try to see him on the same level as Me."

## UNIVERSAL MIND, ABSOLUTE BACKING

**Devotee:** In his purport to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 4.12.33, Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Swāmī Prabhupāda wrote something in connection with the story of Dhruva Mahārāj. He said that Dhruva Mahārāj was a very powerful devotee and could take his mother back to Godhead, and then he wrote, "If one of my disciples becomes as strong as Dhruva Mahārāj, then he can take me back to

Godhead." This statement seems very mysterious.

**Śrīla Śrīdhar Mahārāj:** Dhruva's mother was his Guru, his *vartma-pradarśaka-guru*, his first guide, just as Cintāmaṇi was in the case of Bilvamaṅgala Ṭhākura. Through Cintāmani, that Kṛṣṇa-function as *Ācārya* came as *vartma-pradarśaka*, and in a similar way Dhruva was initially inspired by his mother; his first spiritual instruction was from her. Next he received guidance from Nārada, and then by dint of his *bhajan* he attained the next stage, and then again he went further. But his *vartma-pradarśaka-guru* was his mother, and yet she was to be apparently left behind.

The *vartma-pradarśaka-guru* is the one who first gets the *kaniṣṭha-adhikārī bhakta* started on the progressive spiritual path. But we have to consider the past lives of Dhruva and his mother. In his past life Dhruva had made more progress, but then in that life it was arranged by the Lord that his mother would get him started in the proper direction, and thereafter he adopted the path of *bhajan*. Both of them had previous lives of progress in the proper direction, but sometimes a primary teacher may have a student who is an extraordinary scholar.

In my school days, I remember there was a case we had to read about in history class in connection with the famous statesman Edmund Burke and the taxation laws passed by Parliament at the time of the American Revolutionary War. It happened that his ser-

vice was so much appreciated that he had the title of 'lord' conferred upon him, and to make him a lord, his father and then his grandfather were also awarded the title of 'lord.' The title of 'lord' comes from up to down, but in that case, it went from down to up! The grandson was first given the recognition of lord, and then the father, and then the grandfather. The grandson received the title first by dint of his capacity. So it may be that because of previous arrangements, a less qualified person may give a push to a more qualified person in the beginning, and in return the more qualified person may later help him. Thus the Guru will instruct God-consciousness to different people in different places. From different directions one may receive help.

**Devotee:** And when Śrīla Narottama dās Ṭhākura says, "*Cakhu-dāna dilo yei, janme janme prabhu sei* (He who has given me the gift of transcendental vision is my lord, birth after birth)"—?

**Śrīla Śrīdhar Mahārāj:** Whenever there is any difference in the spiritual advice we may receive from different directions, we are to see the common thread. However, the absolute position will warrant a higher consideration than the relative one. Both the absolute and relative considerations must continue, because without that, no progress is possible. Absolute and relative—both considerations must go side by side. But the absolute has the primary position, and the relative, the temporary, shall be evaluated according to what is suitable to the

particular time, place, person, and purpose. So in this, the longest journey of our lives, and for our greatest interest, we are given the truth, the connection of the Absolute, always—and there is unity.

Even in the case of an ordinary Guru of lower type, the *śāstra* has also maintained that link: *parokṣa-vāda vedo 'yam*. If a certain standard of self-discipline such as no meat or fish-eating, etc. is demanded of those who are very much conditioned by lower propensities, then they won't come into the fold; but the policy is that they must come, so some allowances are given. For a particular type of disciple there will be a corresponding Guru and a similar *śāstra*, but it is with the hope that they will take up the path of progress. The *śāstras* are so generous in going to the lowest section, and the corresponding Guru will also be there. Similar Guru, similar *śāstra,* and similar *sādhu*—all are extended to the lowest plane to elevate the conditioned souls by a gradual process.

And the *śāstra* has got in its mind that in this gradual process some provision must be given, otherwise a great many will give it up. That universal mind is there, and that sort of consciousness is in the minds of the *ṛṣis* who have prepared those *śāstras,* and in the corresponding Gurus as well. The *sādhus* and *śāstras* are going to the extremity of the sinful area, because otherwise there would be no chance for anyone to rise from that level. But generally the disciples, the *sādhakas,* will take up spiritual practices from their

own plane—their own level of realization or inner evolution—they'll go up from there, and along the way also they will find the appropriate Guru and *śāstra*.

It is just like this: our sight is within a particular spectrum—we can't see very much intense light, nor very meager light either. The same with sound; we can't hear very high frequency sound, nor very low. So we are working in the relative position. But we are told to stick to the absolute thread continually in order to properly understand the whole. Therefore don't undermine the *Ācārya*. Although you may be seeing some ordinary characteristics there—eating, sleeping—don't undermine him! Otherwise you'll be the loser. Just as in the Ganges water, we are not to take notice of the stones, the wood, the foam; Ganges water can purify everything. What is it that can purify? Its water aspect? No. There is another aspect, and if that is analyzed, ultimately we will see the order of the Lord: it is His order that Ganges water will purify. So the purifying power comes from His will; His will is backing that. We shall try to find the absolute backing everywhere; and if we can't sacrifice the relative position, then we'll have to go to the plane of *nirviśeṣa* (the undifferentiated aspect of the absolute in which service is absent).

There is a complete system which comprises Kṛṣṇa and His Associates of different types, and we want to have our connection with both *Śakti* (the Potency) and *Śaktimān* (the Possessor of Potency). We can never

sacrifice either of Them, especially *Śakti*. For example, when Raghunātha Dās Goswāmī says, "I do not want Kṛṣṇa if Rādhārāṇī is not there; rather, I want Rādhārāṇī," then *who is* Rādhārāṇī? Who is She? She is the one who is full of Kṛṣṇa to the greatest degree, so Dās Goswamī says, "I want Rādhārāṇī." Kṛṣṇa is there, and in different relative positions He comes to each particular person as sweet, sweeter, sweetest. In this way, we find such relativity.

## Harmonizing Instructions of the Upper House

**Devotee:** It is said there are five principles for *Bhakti*—associating with devotees, chanting *Harināma,* hearing *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam,* worshipping Tulasī, and residing in the holy *Dhāma*. In regard to residing in the *Dhāma,* is that for the general devotees, or just especially fortunate or more advanced devotees?

**Śrīla Śrīdhar Mahārāj:** Generally it means for *madhyama-adhikārī* devotees, those who can discriminate. *Kaniṣṭha-adhikārīs* cannot differentiate between the various positions of different personalities—who is advanced, who is neutral, or who is envious. But "religion means proper adjustment"—our Guru Mahārāj used to say this now and then, and that "proper adjustment" requires *sambandha-jñāna,* knowing what is what. Then one's service will come accordingly, and one's necessity, one's destination, will be established from that. Sanātana Goswāmī is the *Ācārya*

of *sambandha-jñāna*. "Who am I? Where am I? What am I?" All these questions—"Why am I troubled? What is the real purpose of my life?"—are answered when there is proper adjustment with the Absolute and the relative. Nothing can be sacrificed.

And one thing we must always keep in mind is that we can't investigate all of the subtle, higher knowledge as a subjective researcher. Rather, according to the degree of our *śaraṇāgati,* our surrender, the Truth will come down to make Himself known to us. We must always remember this, otherwise some spirit of imitation will be created in us. Knowledge of the higher domain is not under the jurisdiction of the intellect, and to think so is very dangerous. Intellectualism is dangerous; it will cause us to think that we have "caught the Infinite". It will be negligence to the infinite characteristic, the infinite aspect of the Lord. He is Adhokṣaja, beyond the grasp of academic research.

One time I asked Prabhupāda (Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Saraswatī Ṭhākura), "Śrīla Rūpa Goswāmī gives his explanation of Lord Balarām's *Rāsa-līlā* in one way and Śrīla Sanātan Goswāmī gives his explanation in another way, but both get their instruction from Mahāprabhu, so why is there this difference?" My Guru Mahārāj said, "Why has Kṛṣṇa been called *Adhokṣaja*? Adhokṣaja cannot be harmonized within our intellect. It is *acintya-bhedābheda,* inconceivably and simultaneously one and different. Both explanations may be true simultaneously. It is *acintya*, inconceivable. The

*Ācāryas* have explained that when Baladeva is performing *Rāsa-līlā,* He is actually conducting *Rāsa* for Kṛṣṇa in His heart. Externally Baladeva is seen to be participating in Pastimes with the *Gopīs* directly, but internally He is making Kṛṣṇa enjoy that *Rāsa*. Baladeva is not the enjoyer Himself." These are the harmonizing instructions of the upper house, and in this way we shall harmonist things.

## Full Satisfaction, Absolute Realization

**Devotee:** Mahārāj, the different animals, insects, and trees in the *Dhāma*—how shall we view them?

**Śrīla Śrīdhar Mahārāj:** They are wholesale *cinmaya*. They are not under bondage, but are posing in different ways; there are different types of service, and they have their fullest satisfaction in their own plane of service. They imbibe the most blissful internal feeling thereby, and do not want any other. In their relative position, they are fully satisfied there. In other *rasas* also, *Sakhya* or *Vātsalya—yāṅra yei rasa, sei sarvottama*: each person feels, "What I have is the best. I have got the best position and I do not care to go to any other." *Śānta-rasa* is also like that: the trees and creepers, the sands, and so many animals and birds are there, but still there is a qualitative difference between them. Uddhava, the highest devotee in Dwārakā, aspires to take birth as a creeper in Vṛndāvan. So there are qualitative differences within *śānta-rasa*. In Dwārakā also

there is *śānta-rasa*; but he who has the highest type of *sakhya-rasa* in Dwārakā aspires after the *śānta-rasa* service in Vṛndāvan once he has gotten a little peep into the atmosphere of the type of service rendered there. This shows that even the highest thing in a particular place still has its relative position in the absolute consideration. Though the relative position is satisfied there, the absolute always surpasses it; otherwise the unity, the connection with the whole, would ultimately be dislocated and disorganized.

So the absolute consideration is possible from any position. Although all servitors are fully satisfied where they are, in their own position, they realize the supremacy of Vṛndāvan. *Taṭastha-vicāra* (impartial consideration) is always there, and between the relative and the absolute, the absolute always takes the upper hand. *Sarva-dharmān parityajya:* The absolute or 'revolutionary' consideration is firmly established above the relative or 'constitutional' one when Śrī Kṛṣṇa says in *Bhagavad-gītā* (18.56), "Just abandon all *dharmas,* all considerations of social and religious duties—even the ones that I Myself have established in the various scriptures and described here in My previous instructions to you—and just surrender wholeheartedly to Me."

Everywhere, the absolute consideration prevails. In connection with Guru, Narottama dās Ṭhākura has his Gurudeva Lokanātha, but still he aspires: "When will the day come when Lokanātha will take me by my

hand and guide me to Śrīla Rūpa Goswāmī? When will he surrender me to Śrīla Rūpa Goswāmī and give me some engagement there in that camp?" In this high type of expression, the absolute consideration is also there underground.

## CHAPTER THREE

# Seeing with the Eye of the Soul

**Devotee:** Guru Mahārāj, I have one question about Tulasīdevī. The devotees here at this *maṭh* say that even if their *japa-mālā* is not made from real Tulasī, when you chant on their beads at the time of their initiation, you turn those beads into Tulasī-*mālā*. So, is it important to have *japa-mālā* made of Tulasī, or not?

**Śrīla Śrīdhar Mahārāj:** There is a higher spiritual consideration.

> **yasyātma-buddhiḥ kuṇape tri-dhātuke**
> **sva-dhīḥ kalatrādiṣu bhauma ijyadhīḥ**

There is *bhauma* (mundane), and there is *ijyadhīḥ*

(that which we consider worshipable). What I really want to revere—if I consider that to be of mundane nature, that will be an offense. It is an offense. *Arccye viṣṇau śilā-dhīḥ:* If I think that what I am to worship is simply stone; or *guruṣu nara-matiḥ*—if I consider Gurudeva to be an ordinary man; or *vaiṣṇave jāti-buddhir*—if I see a Vaiṣṇava as a *brāhmaṇa,* a *śūdra*, etc.; or *viṣṇor vā vaiṣṇavānāṁ kali-mala-mathane pāda-tīrthe 'mbu-buddhiḥ*—if we think that the water that washes the lotus feet of Lord Viṣṇu or the Vaiṣṇava, *caraṇāmṛta*, is just plain water; or *viṣṇau sarvveśvareśe tad-itara-sama-dhīḥ*—if we think that the Master of all, the Lord of all, Viṣṇu, is merely one of many gods; then yasya vā *nārakī saḥ*—we shall have to go straight to hell. This is stated in the *Padma Purāṇa.*

And in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam,* we find *yasyātma-buddhiḥ kuṇape tri-dhātuke:* That soul who identifies himself with the body, or thinks that "The wife and children are my own," or who thinks that "Our worshipful object is something material," or who thinks that "It is the material element of water at these pilgrimage sites which is purifying," then *sa eva gokharaḥ*—he may be considered to be a donkey which can be used to carry the food of the cows! *Khara* means the donkey which carries a burden, so *gokhara* means that beast of burden which cannot even be utilized for the purposes of the human section, but only for the beasts; a very low, beast-conception. So we are to remove ourselves from the platform of identifying the spiritual with the mate-

rial. The spiritual is necessary, not the material, and it is imperative that we understand the real position.

## RĀVAṆA DECEIVED

Once, Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu was the guest of a devotee of the primary class belonging to the Rāmānuja school who was very much shocked to hear about the abduction of Sītādevī by Rāvaṇa. At that time the devotee managed to give some food to the Lord, but he himself was observing fasting and was always wailing and lamenting. Mahāprabhu asked, "Why are you not taking anything to eat?" He replied, "I want to die. I heard that my beloved Mother Jānakī, Sītādevī, was abducted by a demon! If I have to hear that—if that should even enter my ear, then I want to die; I don't want to live any longer."

Then Mahāprabhu consoled him: "No, no, don't think like that. Sītādevī is Lakṣmīdevī herself. She is *cinmaya,* consciousness personified, not having a body composed of any material elements. Sītādevī's body is not made of flesh and blood, so what to speak of forcibly carrying Her away, Rāvaṇa could not possibly touch Her, he cannot even *see* Her. Sītādevī's form is composed of such substance that Rāvaṇa can neither see nor touch Her! This is the fact. So don't disturb your mind. This is the truth, I say, so you take *prasādam*." Then that devotee took *prasādam*.

Later Mahāprabhu went further south, and in one place He found that the devotees there were reading

the *Kurma Purāṇa,* wherein it is mentioned that when Rāvaṇa came to steal away Sītā, She took shelter by entering into fire, and the fire-god Agni gave some imitation Sītā to Rāvaṇa, and Rāvaṇa took that *'māyā*-Sītā' away. Then after killing Rāvaṇa and attaining victory, before taking Sītā from Laṅkā, Rāmacandra said, "To prove Her chastity, She must enter into blazing fire, and if She can pass through that test, then I shall accept Her. But for one whole year She was living with the demon-family, and therefore I cannot immediately trust Her chastity." Then so many devotees began to weep, but by the order of Rāmacandra the fire was prepared and Sītādevī had to enter. When the fire receded, Sītādevī came out with a smiling face and the devotees began to cry out, *"Jaya! Sītādevī ki jaya!"*

This was written in that *Kurma Purāṇa,* and Mahāprabhu asked the reader, "Please give Me that original page and insert a newly-written copy in there; I met a *brāhmana* who is extremely troubled, thinking that Sītādevī was actually abducted by Rāvaṇa. I want to show him this old page of this book to convince him that I was not just consoling him, but it is written in the *śāstra* that Rāvaṇa could not touch the real Sītādevī because She is consciousness personified—not matter, not any flesh or blood or bone or any such things."

## The Soul Has Its Own Body

If a ghost can show his form, or a *yogī* can show his form, then is not God able to show *His* form? He can do

so. By His will, "Let there be water," there was water; and when He said "Let there be light," there was light. His will is law. Whatever He wants to do, at once it is done; so will He have to have a permanent flesh-and-blood body? At His will He can show anything as He likes, and it is all spiritual with no touch of the contamination of any mundane substance. But the eye in the higher domain of reality is not like the fleshy eye here. Everything is there: the eye, the ear—but they are not the same as here. Just as in dreams, our fleshy eyes do not work, these ears do not work, yet within our dream we see, feel, walk, eat and drink. The mind is only 'half material,' and if even in the mental plane all these activities are possible, then transcending that also is the pure spiritual world, and there is the spiritual eye, the spiritual ear, the spiritual mind—everything is spiritual. It is possible.

On the battlefield, when two tanks come to fight, the men within the tanks may think "The tanks are moving like two demons pushing one another!" The tanks are crashing together, but the *man* is within. Similarly, the soul within this body has its own body, its own plane of living, its own food—everything of its own in the spiritual realm—and this world is the perverted reflection of that realm. We must purely aspire after a life in that spiritual realm, and purity depends on love, and love means sacrifice, "Die to live." We have to die wholesale in regard to our interest in life here, and then another sort of interest will awaken within us and we shall live

there, in that place. That is our aspiration, and for that we have left all our 'concrete' things—our house, our property, our friends, our father, mother, children, and other relatives. So many things we have left, and we have gone out in the quest of other things. We have no more charm for mundane possessions, we are seeking something which is supra-mundane.

'Mundane' means under the jurisdiction of mortality: at every second it is dying. Everything on which we depend for the maintenance of this body is dying at every second. Everything. So we want to be out of this dying land, and if it is possible, we want to live in a land where there is no death. That is *amṛta*—that which is without death—and that is sweet, it is Vaikuṇṭha; it is Goloka. *Vaikuṇṭha* means in the consideration of the infinite perspective—that conception. *Kuṇṭha* means limitation, and *Vaikuṇṭha* means unlimited. To live in Vaikuṇṭha means to live in the relativity of the infinite whole.

## THE PUREST PRAYER

**Devotee:** Mahārāj, also regarding Tulasīdevī—I noticed that at this *maṭh*, while circumambulating Tulasī during her *āratī* here, the devotees don't like to chant the mantra *yāni kāni ca pāpāni brahma-hatyādikāni ca, tāni tāni praṇaśyanti pradakṣiṇah pade pade* ("Those who circumambulate Śrīmatī Tulasīdevī step by step destroy whatever sins they have committed, even the

killing of a *brāhmaṇa*"). Why is this?

**Śrīla Śrīdhar Mahārāj:** A devotee of higher order must not have any prayer to "Absolve me from sin." The first-class devotee will pray, "Whatever I have done wrong, I am ready to suffer for that, to the farthing. But my prayer is only that I may get a drop of the nectar of the favor of Kṛṣṇa." That should be the prayer of a real devotee. *paśu-pākhī haye thāki svarge vā niraye tava bhakti rahu bhaktivinoda hṛdaye*: according to my *karma* I may be a bird, I may be a beast, I may be a worm or an insect, I may be in heaven or in hell—I don't care about that. According to my own *karma,* let me suffer accordingly. But my only prayer is, "Let me not be devoid of the favor of Kṛṣṇa; let me get that. I want His grace; I want devotion for Him. Only devotion—that is all I want. Whether I have to enjoy the result of my good works in heaven, or I have to suffer for the misdeeds of my previous life and go to hell, I don't care to get out of that. As a result of my *karma* I shall have to suffer or enjoy, but I don't care about that. My prayer is not to remove the reactions to my sins, to take away any good merit or bad result—but only that I may obtain pure devotion independent of these two.

"I do not want release from either happiness or suffering; let it be, according to my previous *karma*. Rather, what I want from this moment on is that I will never try to waste the favor of Kṛṣṇa by only praying to be able to face any eventuality; but that whatever I shall acquire from now on, however small, even a drop—that must be

nectar of the highest order, and the lower delegation can deal with the question of heaven and hell."

For removing our reactions or delivering us from hell or heaven, much lower agents are required; they can do that. But we shall only pray for Kṛṣṇa's favor as a positive attainment, and never try to minimize our previous *karma*, the result of bad activities performed due to misconception. I don't care about the 'passport'; I want the 'visa'. If I get the visa, no passport trouble will be able to disturb me—it is something like that. So to merely do away with *māyā*, misconception, is nothing. But the positive attainment in the domain of Krsna is a very much higher thing. By passing *māyā* we can attain Virajā, Brahmaloka, we can get *mukti* (liberation), the marginal position. But why should I waste my energy only to acquire a position in the marginal plane? All my attempts must be focused toward the prayer for a position in Goloka, and that will be a gain of the very highest order. I shall pray only for that, and automatically everything else will be accomplished.

## SĀVITRĪ'S ENCOUNTER WITH YAMARĀJA

There is a story from the *Purāṇas* which illustrates this principle, the story of Sāvitrī and Satyavān. Sāvitrī was a chaste lady who had acquired special capabilities through the performance of certain penances, and one day she went to the forest with her husband Satyavān, knowing that this day was the day of his death. She knew that this was the day of her husband's death, but he

did not. While cutting wood in the forest, Satyavān said, "I have a headache; I need to take a nap." Sāvitrī was prepared and Satyavān put his head on her lap and slept. In his sleep he died of heart failure, and Yamarāja came to take him. First Yamarāja's agents came, but finding that Satyavān's body was on the lap of his very pure and chaste wife, they could not venture to take him.

Then Yamarāja himself came and told Sāvitrī, "You leave him; he's dead. Leave his body." Sāvitrī said, "Yes, you may take him." Yamarāja took Satyavān's soul, but then he saw that Sāvitrī, by dint of her penances, was closely following him in pursuance of her husband. Yamarāja said, "Oh, why are you coming? I am taking him. You must go back."

Sāvitrī replied, "No, I can't. I shall go also."

Yamarāja said, "No, you must not come. Why are you disturbing my duty? This is the arrangement of the Creator, Lord Brahmā, and you must obey that."

Sāvitrī replied, "It is better to die than to live without my husband."

Then Yamarāja said, "Alright, I will give you a boon. Accept that and be satisfied." Sāvitrī asked that her father-in-law and mother-in-law, who were blind, would regain their sight. Yamarāja said, "Yes, they will regain their sight." But Sāvitrī continued to follow him, saying, "I am not yet satisfied completely."

"Then take another boon."

"Well, if you are pleased to offer another boon, my father-in-law and mother-in-law have also lost their

kingdom, so now please arrange for them to be reinstalled in their own kingdom."

"Yes, I say they will get back their kingdom." But again Sāvitrī began following him.

"Again you are coming?"

"Yes, I can't live without the company of my husband."

"Take another boon."

"Yes."

"What is that?"

"I want one hundred sons."

"Yes, you shall have one hundred sons." Still Sāvitrī kept following behind Yamarāja. "*Now* why are you coming? I told you that you would have one hundred sons." She replied, "If you are taking my husband, then how can I get any sons?"

Then Yamarāja was perplexed: "Yes, that's true. What can I do?" So he appealed to the higher force. Sāvitrī's boon was sanctioned, and she got her husband back. Yamarāja had already committed himself—"You will get a hundred sons"—so Sāvitrī asserted that "You have clearly sanctioned that I will get a hundred sons; therefore you certainly can't take my husband!"

The general idea is that if we get some backing from the higher sphere, that will overrule all mandates imposed by the plane of mortality. If we are given a place in Goloka, we cannot be detained in this mundane world. When Tulasīdevī can give us a place *there*, then why should we waste our prayer to her by asking,

"Please clear away the dirt on which I am standing"? That is self-deception. So we shall always pray to the higher servitors for the higher service of the Lord. We won't care about where we might be; that problem will automatically be solved. If we get some higher appointment in the divine realm, then automatically we can't be detained here. Therefore a *śuddha bhakta*, a pure devotee, from the core of his heart will never pray for anything else, for that would be a waste of energy. Only, "Pure inclination toward the service of my eternal Lord—that I want. I know nothing else but that, and I do not want anything else."

A pure devotee won't pray for anything but for the higher service of the Lord of his heart. He can't even imagine asking for anything for his or her own interest. In Christianity such self-sacrifice is also present. And greater than that is self-forgetfulness: the self is there, but the servitor is forgetful of that and is cent-per-cent absorbed in attending to the pleasure of the Lord. No self-interest, wholesale self-forgetfulness—they are unconscious of their own particular interest because it has become merged in the interest of the Lord, the Absolute Whole.

So one who is aspiring to become a pure devotee should never desire anything else but to purely serve and give joy to the Lord of his heart. When one is unconscious of everything else—"Let it be, whatever He may like"—that is pure devotion for Tulasī, or whomever we are praying to. If one has got that higher *sukṛti,* that

*śuddha-bhakti,* the seed of *Prema-bhakti*, then he won't be able to think of anything else but Kṛṣṇa's pleasure. He'll think only of the pleasure of his Lord, cent per-cent, forgetting his own body, mind—everything. That is the purest type of prayer.

## Chapter Four

According to one's *sukṛti* and inner adaptability and grace from above, the soul within will experience awakenment, emerge with some taste, and according to that taste he will adjust himself with the environment. According to his internal taste he'll find, "These friends, this type of service, this company—these seem to be my own! This is tasteful; very, very tasteful." According to his taste he will take some particular type of 'food'. Just as when animals are let loose they will take food according to their own choice, so the awakened soul will be able to select a proper environment for himself. His

inner taste will guide him: "This is very charming; this is attracting my heart. I feel helpless—I can't control myself, so much attraction do I feel for this particular thing." In that way he will be guided. Intuition will direct him. In this world we find intuition, and in the plane of divine life also there is intuition—the undiscovered tendency in the self—and that will perform the function of selection, elimination, and new acceptance. As we go on with our *sādhana,* with the process of realization, elimination and new selection will come, gradually. Gradually it will take us up.

Why have all of you from the Western countries come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness? You were students of Christianity, mostly, so why has Kṛṣṇa consciousness attracted your soul, your inner heart? You had some sort of religious conception, but why did you leave that, leaving so many traditional formalities and so many friends within that circle? Why have you left them to bring yourself here, in Kṛṣṇa consciousness? For what have you come, taking such risk? The country, the society, the religious conception—you have left them all and come forward for Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and moreover as active preachers. That tendency will again push you into the selection of different departments of service in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Our inner tendency, inner liking or hankering, will guide us. "This particular sort of service is very pleasing to me; I cannot but associate myself with this sort of service." That will be the guide: cooperation with the

*caittya-guru,* the Guru inside, the 'dictator' within. The Guru is outside and inside. When we cannot catch the dictation of the inner dictator-Guru, then we must have some guidance from the *mahānta-guru* outside and from scripture. We always want guidance along the path, and when we reach a certain stage, from there our *ruci* may guide us. Our inner dictating tendency may guide us like intuition, just as birds and beasts are guided by intuition.

## Weeds Curtailing the Bhakti Creeper

**Devotee:** Then, Mahārāj, in this connection, why is it that there are so many practitioners of Kṛṣṇa consciousness who, for whatever reasons, have given up their previous devotional association?

**Śrīla Śrīdhar Mahārāj:** From a general perspective, the life of wholesale dedication is not a very easy thing to swallow; so many difficulties are in the way: previous tendencies, and also the possibility of offenses in the choice of thought, speech, and behavior due to our free-will. The defect is there; it is not a perfect thing. Our free will is very weak and limited. *Sādhana* means elimination and new acceptance, and within that also so many difficulties and disturbances may come from our past tendencies which do not allow us to progress smoothly. Though I know that what I see is a higher form of service, my previous tendencies won't allow me to accept that and to undergo the austerities and chal-

lenges that are necessary for that service. There are so many difficulties, like weeds. This is described in *Śrī Chaitanya-charitāmṛta:*

**brahmāṇḍa bhramite kona bhāgyavān jīva**
**guru-kṛṣṇa-prasāde pāya bhakti-latā-bīja**
**kintu yadi latāra saṅge uṭhe 'upaśākhā'**
**bhukti-mukti-vāñchā, yata asaṅkhya tāra lekhā**
**'niṣiddhācāra', 'kuṭīnāṭī', 'jīva-himsana'**
**'lābha', 'pūjā', 'pratiṣṭhādi' yata upaśākhā-gaṇa**
**seka-jala pāñā upaśākhā bāḍi' yāya**
**stabdha hañā mūla-śākhā bāḍite nā pāya**
(C.c. Madhya-līlā 19.151, 158-60)

"According to their *karma*, all living entities are wandering throughout the entire universe. Some are being elevated to the upper planetary systems, and some are going down into the lower planetary systems. Out of many millions of wandering living entities, one who is very fortunate gets the opportunity to associate with a bona fide spiritual master by the grace of Kṛṣṇa. By the mercy of both Kṛṣṇa and the spiritual master, such a person receives the seed of the creeper of devotional service."

"Unwanted weeds growing with the *bhakti* creeper are forbidden acts, violence, duplicity, mundane profiteering, adoration and popularity, etc. All these are weeds. If one does not distinguish between the *Bhakti-latā* creeper and the weeds, then the sprinkling of water in the form of devotional practices such as hearing and

chanting etc., is misused, because the weeds are nourished while the *Bhakti-latā* creeper is curtailed."

The creeper of devotion becomes a sprout and gradually grows. Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Goswāmī says here that along with the main creeper of devotion there are also many weeds, and when the creeper receives watering and nourishing, those weeds also grow up as well. *Lābha* means 'gain'—the apparent gain of something, mainly position. But that position and '*pūjā*'—appreciation—which the *sādhaka* receives may then create so many other enemies within him. From the previous tendencies, new enemies come: maybe the desire to accumulate money for self-interested purposes or the desire to get the love of women, and then there is hankering for *pratiṣṭhā*—fame and popularity. So many things may come. When one is "going up", so many difficulties come on the way to check him, but we must consciously shun those things. So many difficulties come on the way, and we must save ourselves from all of the many internal enemies to our aspiration with the help of Guru, *sādhu,* scripture, and our own sincerity, then gradually we shall grow.

And at each new stage that we advance to, there also we shall find some other difficulty. So the path of inner evolution is not strewn with roses; it is a difficult path to walk. As we get nearer to the goal we become more and more free, but in the beginning various difficulties do come to check us. Our previous *karma-phala*—'fruits' of our previous actions will return to be

tasted by us—and tendencies of different types will chase us to try to keep us within their jurisdiction; but upon meeting those difficulties and surpassing them—conquering them—we shall progress higher and higher and the difficulties will lessen. Still something may remain, especially *pratiṣṭhā*.

## MORE HUMILITY: LESS OPPOSITION

**tṛṇād iva sunīcena, taror iva sahiṣṇunā**
**amāninā mānadena kīrtanīyaḥ sadā hariḥ**
(*Śikṣāṣṭakam* 3)

While treading the path to *Bhakti*, if we are well-equipped with this helpful mood, then we shall certainly meet less opposition. *Tṛṇād api sunīcena:* humbler than a blade of grass. I won't allow myself to be the cause of any friction with the environment—this will be our first mood and the foremost guideline for our conduct. Second, *taror iva sahiṣṇunā:* Still, if any attack does come from the environment, then I shall try to bear it silently, without giving any opposition. And third, *amāninā mānadena:* I won't try to gain any popularity, any good name or fame—I won't hanker for that—but at the same time I shall give proper respect to the environment and to everyone who is in the environment. I shall offer respect, but I won't desire any respect from others. The more we try to go on our way with this mood and corresponding behavior, the less difficulty we shall have to face.

Also, those who are in a mission and under the guidance of a higher realized soul can face many dangers. When we go out to preach we shall have to face many difficulties, but with the help of the higher guidance, we can fight those who are propagating misconception, and we can either subdue them or invite them to meet with the higher leader. In this way, we can give opposition to the forces of *māyā* and counterattack. At that time we shall not adopt the policy that we shall "give no opposition to the environment." No—when we are engaged in preaching, as 'soldiers', we shall approach and face the opposition, and we shall try to 'disarm' him. And if we can't, then we shall invite him to our Guru to be disarmed.

In this way I shall go on, carrying out the orders of the Vaiṣṇava. And if in some way I am 'wounded' by the local environment in that attempt, then my spiritual stamina will increase as a result of following the order of the higher agent–*Vaiṣṇava-sevā;* and I shall be more greatly benefited thereby.

I want '*Vaiṣṇavī-pratiṣṭhā*': I won't want any popularity from the ordinary public—they are almost insane—but I want a position in the eye of my master, my Gurudeva, that, "Yes, he is a promising boy. He will spiritually prosper." When my higher guardians look upon me with some affectionate encouragement, that will be my capital. Their goodwill and liking for me will be my capital on my passage toward the higher realm. When we are alone in a solitary place and going

on with chanting the Holy Name, then of course this *tṛṇād api sunīcena* must be strictly observed at all times. But when fighting under a 'general' in a preaching campaign, then our external demeanor should be a little different, more towards carrying out the order of that higher spiritual general. That will be more gainful.

## THE MEANING OF SANNYĀSA FOR THE VAIṢṆAVA

**Devotee:** Since the general order to go out and preach has been very broadly given to all devotees by Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu, what is the special utility of the *sannyāsa* order in our *sampradāya* when Mahāprabhu has said that it is forbidden in this age of Kali-yuga?

**Śrīla Śrīdhar Mahārāj:** The answer is explained in *Śrī Chaitanya-charitāmṛta*. This is a general question not only for the Gauḍīya *Sampradāya*, but also for the followers of Rāmānuja, Madhvācārya, and even Śaṅkarācārya. The Buddhists may not care for the directions of the *Purāṇas*, but the Śaṇkara school and the Vaiṣṇava schools accept *sannyāsa*. Śaṅkara was a *sannyāsī* and for the most part his successors were all *sannyāsīs* as well. This is true of Rāmānuja also, Madhvācārya, and the Viṣṇuswāmī *Sampradāya* also.

The interpretation is this: in Kali-yuga, *sannyāsa* in the strict sense of *karma-sannyāsa* is forbidden. *Karma-sannyāsa* means that you leave everything, and *that* type of *sannyāsa* is not possible in Kali-yuga. It is

described in the *śāstras* that in Satya-yuga, as long as a man's bones exist, that is how long he will live. Along with the longevity of the bones, the life will be there. In Treta-yuga, life may be maintained by the nervous system; but it is stated that in Kali-yuga, *kalāv annagatāḥ prāṇāḥ*—one's longevity depends on food. Therefore *sannyāsa* in the strict sense is not possible in Kali-yuga.

Previously, Vālmīki was engaged in *tapasyā* for so many years that the insects captured his whole body and reduced the flesh into earth, yet he remained present within his bones. Then later, by the help of some spiritual miracle his whole body was restored. But in Kali-yuga, without food it is not possible to live. All penances have been especially adjusted for Kali-yuga, and the only continuous fast allowed in Kali-yuga is for twenty-four hours; not more than that. In other ages, at least twelve days fasting was generally done. If a person had done anything wrong, then according to the *Smṛti śāstra*, twelve days fasting was the standard punishment for any sins. But in Kali-yuga, twenty-four-hour fasting is the maximum because without food a man cannot survive.

If he were to take *karma-sannyāsa* while being so extremely dependent on material giving and taking, then he wouldn't be able to maintain his existence. But the life of Vaiṣṇava *tridaṇḍa-sannyāsa,* which is not very extreme—take *prasādam*, do service—is a sort of modified form based on *yuktāhāra vihāraś ca,* and one living according to this principle can take *sannyāsa*.

Mahāprabhu took *sannyāsa*, Śaṅkarācārya, Rāmānuja—all the pioneers of the different *sampradāyas* took *sannyāsa*. That has been interpreted as *karma-sannyāsa*, but still, *sannyāsa* is of several kinds. There is also *vidvat-sannyāsa,* which is considered by the salvationist section to be the highest. Their idea is that when one has fully realized that his connection with this material realm is a negative one, he will finish his material encasement and enter into the spiritual sphere. When he is fully established in this firm consciousness that "my connection with the material world will be injurious to me," he will then relinquish his body and go away to the spiritual sky. That is *vidvat-sannyāsa.*

There is also *narottama-sannyāsa:*

**yaḥ svakāt parato veha**
**jāta-nirvveda ātmavān**
**hṛdi kṛtvā hariṁ geyāt**
**pravrajet sa narottamaḥ**

*(Bhā: 1.13.27)*

In the *narottama* system of *sannyāsa*, one has realized the presence or existence of God within his heart, and thinking of Him, he leaves his present engagement and duties of the household and remains outside, anywhere and everywhere—under a tree or in a cave or wherever—careless of his physical needs. He does not immediately relinquish his body, but he takes whatever food he gets, and when he does not get any food he fasts, and in this way he goes on. He leaves the household for good; that is *narottama-sannyāsa*.

And there are also different stages of *sannyāsa* mentioned in the *śāstra: kuṭicaka, bahudaka, haṁsa,* and *paramahaṁsa,* progressively. But *tridaṇḍa-sannyāsa* is when the *sannyāsi* engages himself fully in the service of Godhead by spreading His messages and doing some good to the public, and that characteristic is different. It is categorically different. The *tridaṇḍi-sannyāsī* is not adopting an attitude or tactic of leaving all of the engagements of this world as a result of becoming disgusted with its many temptations. Rather, he is engaging himself in the higher duty of the upper world through an agent, so his body has got utility. Remaining here, maintaining connection here, he is drawing some higher thing from above and distributing that in the environment. That is another conception of *sannyāsa*, and it has positive value.

This is a similar engagement to that performed by the Lord's closest associates. When an incarnation of God comes down, His favorite *pārṣadas*, His friends and servitors, are also sent by Him to come down to do some service to help Him. There are also sub-agents who have received some engagement from the higher agent, and by moving within this world in that capacity, they can earn more spiritual wealth than those who are very eager to disconnect completely from this material plane. They want to try to utilize their connection with this mundane plane to earn some substantial wealth of the upper house. So like the Lord's *pārṣadas*, the *tridaṇḍi-sannyāsīs* want to work as God's agents.

## THE GLORY OF THE DIVINE FEMININE NATURE

**Devotee:** Mahārāj, we know the injunctions forbidding *sannyāsīs* and *brahmacārīs* specifically from mixing with ladies, but what should be the general overall vision of the male section of devotees as we are serving Mahāprabhu's mission together with our Godsisters?

**Śrīla Śrīdhar Mahārāj:** According to the *varṇāśrama* system, generally the *śūdras* (laboring class) and ladies are not allowed direct participation in the higher religious functions. Only indirect participation is allowed for them, and they also do not get the sacred thread. Yet a *brāhmaṇa* boy can be found touching the feet of his mother! The mother will not touch the Deity of Nārāyaṇa, but her son who is worshipping Nārāyaṇa is touching her feet and taking her feet-dust. Such a position is there in the *varṇāśrama* system. Women are generally considered unfit or below the standard of engaging in direct service to the Lord, but in the Vaiṣṇava conception there is no such strictness about that.

In my youth some sort of disregard grew in my mind about the lady section—"I must keep far away from them; they are untouchable." But that notion was amended by my aunt in this way: She noted my nature, my conduct, and once affectionately remarked to me, "Oh, don't you know that ladies represent Lakṣmīdevī? They belong to the same section, and in them the qualities of sacrifice and submission are very clearly visible, so they should be respected. They should be respected,

and the aggressive male nature is to be viewed unfavorably. The feminine ego-conception is an ideal of a very noble type wherein sacrifice, the devotional aspect, is very prominent. Ladies are not aggressors; they are sacrifice personified. Whereas the male nature—that is aggressive."

Gradually that idea came to me and I learned to appreciate Sītā, Draupadī, and so many others, especially the supreme example shown by the *Gopīs*. The standard established by the *Gopīs* has shown that self-forgetfulness, self-sacrifice, and self-surrendering reaches its zenith, its highest conception, in the lady-aspect. The passive aspect holds the highest position: that viewpoint came gradually and caused a turnabout within my mind.

*Madhura-rasa*, consorthood, is the highest position, and within Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī we find the greatest degree of sacrifice and affection. The males are the aggressors; they are responsible for all the difficulties and troubles, not the ladies. That we possess the aggressive nature of a male is the disease in us. Gradually that perception developed from inside, and ultimately I found that when the female nature is pure and in connection with the Supreme *Līlā* of *Vātsalya-rasa* and *madhura-rasa,* it holds the highest position in the topmost realm. And our aspiration is for engagement in the service of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī.

The position of Śrī Rādhā is that of the highest service to Kṛṣṇa, and *Rādhā-dāsyam* has been considered

by Mahāprabhu to be the highest attainment. Vāsudeva Ghoṣa says:

**(yadi) gaura nā haita, tabe ki haita**
**kemane dharitām de'**
**rādhāra mahimā prema-rasa-sīmā**
**jagate jānāta ke?**

Who could disclose this holy, divine fact if Śrī Gaurāṅga did not personally appear on this Earth? Who could let us know, who could inform us that the highest servitor is Rādhārāṇī? But Gaurāṅga did come, and He clearly showed that the highest conception of service is to be engaged in the service of that highest, Negative Potency.

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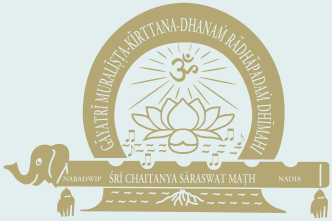
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